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ABSTRACT

Although graduate programs in psychology devote a substantial amount of time to research training, relatively few psychologists produce research. Psychology graduate students (N=2032) in university and professional school settings participated in a mail survey focusing on students' attitudes toward research in their training and careers. Comparison of clinical, applied, non-applied and professional school students indicated that all planned to devote some career time to research: non-applied students expected to devote the most time to research and professional school students the least. Overall, research interest increased with training and experience. However, a positive correlation was also found between increased research interest and obtaining statistically significant results in one's research. Eclectic was the most frequent first choice theoretical orientation of academic department students; behavioral and psychodynamic were next most popular among clinical students. The non-applied students were the most different from clinical students in terms of attitudes and orientation. Non-applied students tended to be significantly more behaviorally-oriented than the other groups; they were more enthusiastic about graduate school research, were more satisfied with their research, and reported obtaining significant results more often than clinical students. The findings suggest that demands of jobs, problems of learned models of research, or a shift of interests may affect subsequent research output. (Author/NRB)

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PSYCHOLOGY GRADUATE STUDENTS ATTITUDES TOWARD RESEARCH: A NATIONAL SURVEY

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Clinical Psychology Graduate Students' Attitudes Towards Research: A National Survey

Most graduate programs in psychology devote a substantial amount of time to research training. The literature suggests, however, that relatively few psychologists go on to produce research. This lack of research productivity has been particularly noted for those trained in clinical psychology. Though many hypotheses to account for this have been suggested, none have been fully explored.

The focus of this survey was to ascertain psychology graduate students' attitudes and activities with regard to research as an aspect of their interests and career plans, and to further determine whether attitudes toward research change as a function of the amount of training and experience, whether interest varies from specialty area to specialty area, and whether it is influenced by faculty models. One hypothesis considered was that students may initially have great enthusiasm for research, but become increasingly disenchanted because often irrelevance of research to real life problems and an over-emphasis on reserach in graduate school.

Method

A questionnaire was developed covering the following broad areas: (1) Career goals, (2) Involvement in research and research achievement, (3) Satisfaction with research training, (4) Feelings about graduate school in general.

Psychology departments included in the survey were from the Graduate Study in Psychology for 1978-79 list of those with APA approved clinical

programs. Fifty percent were randomly selected. In addition, six professional schools were included. Of the 48 academic departments contacted, 34 agreed to participate, as did three of the six professional schools. Questionnaires were sent for all the graduate students in cooperating departments, but individual participation was voluntary. A cover letter addressed to the student, explaining the purpose of the project, was included with an envelope to mail the questionnaire directly to the experimenter. Data analysis was done in terms of percentage of students choosing each response to each question for the sample as a whole, and then comparing the basic speciality groups on each item. An additional measure of research productivity was compiled for each student and this was compared with a measure of faculty productivity.

Results

Sample Description. Thirty-three academic departments participated in the survey, a cooperation rate of 69%. This represents 34% of all U. S. departments offering APA approved clinical training. Three professional schools participated.

A total of 2,032 questionnaires were returned, an overall student return rate of 53%. The return rate was not significantly different for the academic and professional schools. The range of cooperation for students at departments was from 19% to 79%. Approximately 19% of all U. S. graduate students in psychology departments with APA approved clinical training participated.

Comparison Groups Designations

The data were analyzed according to groupings of (1) all students in the academic departments, and (2) all students at professional schools. The academic departments were further subdivided: (3) clinical, (4) non-clinical applied, and (5) non-applied.

A. All Academic Department Students (N = 1,893)

The mean age was 27 years, 56% were male, 94% were full time. They were evenly distributed with regard to year level in graduate school, and 97% were pursuing a doctorate.

The speciality areas were clinical, 39%; social, 10%; developmental, 8%; experimental, 8%; organizational, 7%; physiological, 7%.

The first choice theoretical-orientation was eclectic, 49%, followed by behavioral, 24%. The last choice orientations were psychodynamic, 48%, and behavioral, 22%.

Career-wise, preference was to do 40% professional practice, and 25% and 35% respectively, teaching and research. With regard to research, 62% report having done non-required research while in graduate school, and 64% did non-required research in undergraduate school. Twenty percent of the entire sample indicated that they conducted undergraduate research to gain acceptance into graduate school. In their most recent main research, 46% report statistically significant results, and 18% that the hypothesis was not supported. Thirty-nine percent had had research accepted for publication, and 34% have presented research at conventions. The mean number of publications for the students sampled was .9, σ = 1.7, range 0 - 18. Students' attitudes toward research, overall, were quite positive. Forty-seven percent indicated that their interest in research had increased during graduate school, while only 16% indicated that they had become less interested in it.

B. Clinical Students (N = 746)

Demographically, the clinical students were very similar to the total university population, of which they are a large proportion. The clinical students' preferred theoretical orientation was eclectic, chosen first

by 53% with behavioral chosen first by 18%, and psychodynamic by 16%. The least favored orientations were psychodynamic, chosen last by 43%, and behavioral by 27%.

Career goals of clinical students indicated that they would like to devote a mean of 60% of their work week to clinical practice, 18% to teaching, and 22% to research.

About one-third of the clinical students have had research accepted for publication, and 27% have presented at a convention. Mean number of publications for students was .7, standard deviation, 1.5, range 0 - 18.

The clinical students' attitudes towards the research part of their training were very psotive. Forty-seven percent reported that they're currently more interested in research than when entering graduate school and only 17% indicated that their research interests had decreased during graduate school.

C. Non-clinical Applied (N = 285)

This group included specialities in community, counseling, organizational, and school. Demographically, they were very similar to the clinical students, but tended to be slightly older and more frequently part-time. Theoretically, this group was less favorably inclined toward the psychodynamic position, and more sympathetic toward community/ecological and humanistic positions. Forty-six percent selected eclectic first, 18% selected humanistic, and 18% behavioral. Least preferred was psychodynamic, chosen last by 55%.

D. Non-applied (N = 862)

This group was most different from the clinical students indicated by the fact that only eight of 36 Chi-Square comparisons failed to yield statistically significant differences.

Demographically, they were not different from the other groups, but in terms of career goals they plan to spend very little time in professional practice and much more time in teaching and research. They indicated feeling significantly less adequately prepared for a career than did clinical students. Theoretically, the non-applied students tended to be significantly more behaviorally oriented than the other groups. Eclectic however, was still first choice, 47%, behavioral, 31%, community/ecological, 10%, humanistic, 8%, psychodynamic, 3%. The last choice of the non-applied students was psychodynamic, 51%. This group indicated wanting to do more research than the other groups, and also indicated that, in fact, they do. Forty-five percent of the non-applied students have published, in comparison to 33% of the clinical students. Of those who have published, the majority have two or more publications, and those who have presented are likely to have done so at several meetings. Non-applied students are more enthusiastic about graduate school research and are more satisfied with their research than are the clinical students. Interestingly, they more often get significant results in their studies.

E. Professional Schools (N = 139)

In most respects, the small sample of professional school students did not differ significantly from the clinical students. They do tend to be older and more often to go to school on a part-time basis. Forty-one percent are working toward Ph.D.'s, while 58% expect to be awarded a Doctor of Psychology degree. Theoretically, they differ significantly from the clinical students in that the preferred orientation was psychodynamic chosen by 39%, eclectic next, 29%, behavioral, 21%, community/ecological, 7%, humanistic, 4%. The least chosen orientation for the professional school students was behavioral chosen last by 42%. These

students indicate they would like to devote significantly more time to professional practice than do the clinical students and less time to research. Seventy-four percent of the professional school students indicate that they expect to spend 10% or less of their time on research. The professional school students indicate less interest in doing research or a thesis or dissertation. However, 83% of the professional school students indicated that they were required to write the dissertation. They indicated that compared to clinical students, they did less non-required research in graduate training and as undergraduates. It follows that these students were also less likely to have published or presented at a convention. There were no differences between clinical students' and professional school students' reported satisfaction with their own research or their enthusiasm for research in graduate school.

Student and Faculty Research Productivity

In terms of the comparison of student research productivity with that of the faculty of their department, there was a significant, positive association.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the survey indicates that graduate students in psychology, regardless of field, are interested in research, generally increase their interest and enthusiasm with their training and experience with research, and plan to include at least some research in their careers. That so few ultimately do may have to do with the demands of jobs in the real world, a learned model of research that doesn't work in the real world, or a shift of interests.